

Sermon notes 4.04.10

I am the resurrection and the life

John 11:17-27 & John 20:1-18

Introduction

I'm going to mention 3 films to you (in the hope that you might have seen, or at least heard of one of them). Back to the future (80s hits starring Michael J Fox as Marty McFly who travels in a car that becomes a time machine getting from 1985 to 1955, and back again), Groundhog day (where the same day 2nd Feb is relived over and over again by a weatherman in Punxsatawny, Pennsylvania), and Sliding doors. Gwyneth Paltrow plays a woman who just misses her tube as the train doors slide shut in front of her –all through the film we see what happened when she missed the train and then we see what happened when she caught the train.

These three films have in common the fantasy of reliving days, of altering the past so that the future is different. Haven't we all wished at some time or other that we could do that? Go back and change the past. And never more so than when we've lost someone we love.

If only

Here we are in the midst of the grief of Lazarus' family. If you look at the beginning of chapter 11 you find that Lazarus, friend of Jesus, brother to Martha and Mary is ill and then we find out from Jesus telling his disciples, that Lazarus has died.

Martha goes to meet Jesus as he arrives in Bethany, and words burst from her lips (she's beyond politeness) 'If you had been here then my brother would not have died'. 'If only you'd got here in time Jesus!!

How many times do we say 'If only'? If only I'd got there a few minutes earlier, if only I hadn't said that, if only I'd done it differently, if only she'd worked harder, if only he'd caught a different bus...

Like all nostalgia, it's a bitter-sweet feeling, caressing the moment that might have been, while knowing that it's all fantasy

Conversation

In this passage, Jesus and Martha have a conversation that indicates that the 'back to the future' idea isn't entirely a movie makers fantasy,

But rather it is possible for God to bring the future smack bang into the present

But just like sliding doors, or ground hog day or back to the future it isn't easy to get our heads round. Parts of these films are confusing, not immediately clear. Its part of the suspense. There are bits of that plot that we can't get our heads round at all, bits of it that we'll have to rerun several times before we grasp the meaning, and some bits that won't make sense until we get to the very end.

'In response to Martha's 'if only', her yearning for something that can't be, Jesus responds with 'your brother will rise again' – Jesus points Martha, in her grief, to the future

A bit like saying 'its okay, the film all turns out right at the end. It might be hard to watch now, but just wait.'

Martha says okay I know he'll rise at the last day and perhaps she adds in her mind...(and I'm pleased for him, really I am, but what about for now. How are we going to cope, why did it have to be happen) all the sort of emotions we experience as we mourn the loss of a loved one, all the things we say as we celebrate the life of a faithful believer who we know is with Christ, but who we're missing like crazy and we didn't want to die anyway. It is a comfort to know they're with God, but only a sort of comfort.

'I know he'll rise at the last.' A hanging on to hope as we might express it during a funeral while everything in us cries 'if only'

Martha was expressing the view held by many Jews by that time (But not 'Sadducees') that there would be a future physical resurrection at the end of time.

Future to present

As in 'back to the future' where Marty McFly's time machine car shoots across the screen in an attempt to re-enter 1985 to get back to the future, so Jesus makes a statement to Martha that changes everything, and accelerates the future into the present.

'I AM the resurrection and the life'

As the message paraphrases it... You don't have to wait for the End. I am, Right now, Resurrection and Life.

Here is the future crashing, breaking, tumbling into the present with a bang!

Resurrection is a doctrine, yes. A belief that we hold, with theories attached that can be debated... Resurrection is a future promise, yes. Something we hold onto for loved ones and for ourselves.... But Resurrection is a PERSON!?

Here we are again – face to face with one of these 'I am' claims of Jesus. I am the resurrection and the life.

You know we sing 'he came from heaven to earth to show the way' that's true, but its more than that. He came 'from God's future into the present'. Into the mess and muddle of the world we know. Like a time machine racing across the screen, the future arrives NOW.

The future arrives NOW in the person of Jesus Christ. He IS resurrection and life, we don't have to wait any longer.

"Resurrection life which triumphs over death is not confined to the distant future, but is present here and now in him who is the Resurrection, the embodiment of the promised life and salvation of God. To believe in Jesus means that death lies defeated." (Bruce Milne, The Message of John, BST)

Jesus continues- 'He who believes in me will live, even though he dies'

What does it mean to live, even though we know we're actually going to die?

Jesus offers, right now, an end to spiritual death. We can have lost all hope and be dead to the joys of life, we can be so selfish that we are dead to the needs of others, we can be so insensitive that we are dead to the feelings of others, we can be dead in our sin, as the Apostle Paul puts it, but Jesus right here, right now can bring life, because he is life. We can become 'alive in Christ'.

There are dramatic stories of lives transformed, of murderers who find life and hope in Jesus, people like Nicky Cruz and Tokichi Ishii. But we don't have to be murderers or hardened criminals to need the life that Jesus offers. Our bodies might be falling apart, maybe our marriages, our career, our whole world might be falling apart, but through all things, Jesus offers life. Life NOW.

'And whoever lives and believes in me will never die'

The final words of Edward the Confessor were these: 'weep not, I shall not die; and as I leave the land of the dying I trust to see the blessings of the Lord in the land of the living'.

We often call this earthly life the land of the living, don't we? But the land of the dying would be a far more accurate description. Through Jesus we know that we're journeying towards a sunrise, rather than a sunset. Death is a gate on the skyline (Mary Webb). We're on our way to life

Jesus IS resurrection. He is LIFE

Although this part of John's gospel hasn't reached Easter morning, John keeps pointing us towards death and resurrection of Jesus. It's always pointing to that. Through all the 'I am's', and today here we are. (John 20 that Ian read early on in the service) We've arrived at that day when we find that the stone was rolled away, the tomb was empty, the grave-clothes folded, no longer needed.

If we carry on with the story in chapter 11 we find that Lazarus is raised. That Jesus weeps in anguish, that he has the stone rolled away, that he prays to the father, that he calls out to Lazarus, and out he comes, wrapped in the grave clothes. The raising of Lazarus is amazing, but it's not the climax of the story. Oh no. The climax is what we're celebrating today.

Miraculous as it was, Lazarus' raising was still bound by constraints – the stone had to be rolled away, and the tomb opened, Lazarus had to be called out, he had to be unwrapped. He would face illness again, and physical death once more. We don't hear Lazarus' take on all this do we?

Jesus' resurrection, that which we celebrate today' is so much more. He IS resurrection, he IS life. There are now no constraints.

When the disciples arrived at the tomb, the stone had already be rolled away, the tomb already accessible, the grave clothes were neatly folded, Jesus' body in resurrection glory, beyond death and decay. Jesus is resurrection. Jesus is life.

Don't underestimate the cost!

But what did it cost Jesus to raise Lazarus? It cost him his life. Reading on through the gospel of John we find that following the raising of Lazarus the Sanhedrin plotted to kill Jesus. Perhaps that's why

Jesus was reluctant to go to Bethany. He knew the risks, his impending death, and struggled with them, as he struggled later in the garden.

There was no short-cut then, and there's no short-cut now. What does it cost for us to have life – life in all its fullness? It cost Jesus HIS life.

So what?

'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.

Do you believe this? Jesus says to Martha

'Yes Lord, I believe', she responds....

Wow! Don't forget that she hadn't yet seen Lazarus raised, and yet she could take that step of faith, because it does require faith.

Do you believe this? Jesus says to us today. We who know that Jesus raised Lazarus to life. We who know that God raised Jesus to life. We who celebrate the risen Lord Jesus today.

'Yes. Lord, I believe!

Choose resurrection. Choose life.

Housegroup Notes 4th April 2010

I am the resurrection and the life

John 11:17-27

In the midst of her grief at Lazarus' death, Jesus speaks to Martha about resurrection and life.

Martha believes, along with most Jews of her period (except Sadducees) in a physical resurrection at the end of time, but that is of little comfort whilst she is so newly mourning her brother's death.

Martha rebukes Jesus: *if only* he had been present her brother wouldn't have died.

Jesus makes statements about himself claiming that he is the resurrection and the life. Resurrection is indeed a doctrine, it is a future hope, but it is also a person.

'You don't have to wait for the End. I am right now, resurrection and life' John 11:25 (The Message)

Jesus comes not only from heaven to earth to show the way, but from God's future into the present, right now, into a world of mess and muddle.

Jesus brings an end to spiritual, emotional and moral death

Jesus makes a way to life, where physical death is simply a gateway to the new life.

John's gospel is constantly pointing us towards Jesus' death and resurrection. The account of Lazarus' raising is no exception. Despite the miracle taking place, there are constraints. The tomb has to be opened, Lazarus is called out, he is still bound. He will one day die again. Not so with Jesus' resurrection. There are no constraints.

The cost of bringing new life to Lazarus is great. In doing this miracles Jesus gains the attention of the Sanhedrin who then plot to kill him. The cost of bringing us new life is great. It is Jesus' death on the cross.

Jesus invites Martha to believe. He invites us to believe.

For Discussion.

Think back through the 'I am' sayings of Jesus that we have studied over the last few weeks. Are there any which are particularly powerful for you? Why? Any that are particularly difficult to understand?

What does *resurrection* mean?

'Jesus comes from God's future...into the present.' (Tom Wright). How can we keep in tension the belief that Christ has come into the world, alongside the reality that the world is still a mess?

If Jesus came to you at the funeral of a loved one, what would you say to him?

How can we demonstrate and explain the *life* that Jesus brings to friends, neighbours, colleagues?